

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as many of my colleagues know, over the last several years we worked hard to make veterans eligible for the concurrent receipt of retirement pay and disability benefits.

Under current law, most veterans, except those who were disabled as a result of combat, are prevented from receiving the pay and benefits they have rightly earned while serving this Nation. This is something the Armed Services Committee, with Senators WARNER and LEVIN, worked on with me last year, and we got this done. It was a big step forward, but we need to do more.

My amendment adjusts the budget resolution to pay for phased-in concurrent receipt for veterans with service-related disabilities rated at 60 percent or higher. Although it is not full concurrent receipt, this one change would help tens of thousands of veterans.

I hope everyone supports this most worthy amendment.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise to support Senate amendment No. 341, an amendment to provide partial concurrent receipt for veterans.

I would like to thank my colleague from Nevada for his unwavering and tireless support of veterans throughout the country. My constituents are aware of his advocacy for full concurrent receipt and appreciate his support.

Mr. President, as you know, our current military benefits system requires disabled military retirees who have a service-connected disability to deduct their disability compensation from the funds they would otherwise receive as retirement pay. This requirement unfairly merges two distinct programs and forces many disabled retirees to forfeit a significant portion of their well-deserved retirement pay.

The retirement benefit is an entitlement granted to all members of the U.S. Armed Forces who dedicate 20 or more years to providing our Nation's defenses. Disability compensation, on the other hand, is awarded as a compensation for personnel who are injured in the line of duty. I believe veterans should receive each payment separately. Allowing disabled veterans to receive their full military retired pay and disability compensation will restore fairness and common sense to U.S. military retirement policy.

Last year, President Bush signed compromise legislation that provides concurrent receipt to two veterans groups: one, any retiree receiving disability compensation, of at least 10 percent, whose disability was combat-related and for which the retiree was awarded the Purple Heart; and two, any retiree with a service-connected disability rated at 60 percent or higher incurred as a direct result of armed conflict, while engaged in hazardous service, in the performance of duty under conditions simulating war, or through an instrumentality of war.

Although this compromise was an important first step, it remains an in-

sufficient remedy to a persisting inequity in our veterans benefits system. Senate Amendment No. 341 would expand concurrent receipt to include veterans who have a service-connected disability of at least 60 percent. This is another important step in what will continue to be a long battle to provide concurrent receipt to all eligible veterans—a battle that I remain committed to fighting.

Again, I thank the Senator from Nevada for his leadership on this issue. I encourage my colleagues to support this amendment and look forward to working with them to provide full concurrent receipt for all veterans.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, last year the Armed Services Committee did a lot of good work in this field, and I compliment my colleague from Nevada and also the chairman from the Armed Services Committee and the Senator from Michigan for the great work they did last year.

Concerning the pending amendment by my friend and colleague from Nevada, we have no objection to accepting the amendment by voice vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is time yielded back?

Mr. REID. It is.

Mr. NICKLES. I yield back the remainder of time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time having been yielded back, the question is on agreeing to amendment No. 341.

The amendment (No. 341) was agreed to.

Mr. REID. I move to reconsider the vote, and I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I am prepared to yield to Senator BYRD for his amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed for 5 minutes on each side on this amendment.

Mr. NICKLES. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

AMENDMENT NO. 412

(Purpose: To foster greater debate in the Senate and to prevent further increases in the deficit by striking the reconciliation instructions to the Committee on Finance)

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from West Virginia [Mr. BYRD] proposes an amendment numbered 412.

On page 45, strike beginning with line 20 through page 46, line 2.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, my amendment will strike the reconciliation instructions to the Finance Committee that would shield the President's \$726 billion tax cut from a thorough debate in the Senate. To use reconciliation to increase the deficit is an abuse of the budget process.

The Budget Act framers did not contemplate that reconciliation would ever be used to produce \$726 billion in tax cuts that would be financed through Social Security surpluses and an increasing debt. The Budget Act includes explicit and implicit language underscoring that the purpose of reconciliation is for deficit reduction.

If the reconciliation instructions were removed from the pending budget resolution, the Senate could still pass any economic stimulus plan it chose. To limit debate on such legislation is irresponsible, particularly when the administration has not even explained how it intends to pay for the cost of the war.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. BYRD. I ask for an additional 30 seconds.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, if this budget resolution passes with these reconciliation instructions included, the American people, through their elected representatives in Congress, will be denied their right to have a full debate upon the budgetary priorities of the Nation.

I urge my colleagues to support this amendment and a vote to strike the reconciliation instructions to the Finance Committee from this budget resolution.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time? The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, the Budget Act is 25 years old and 22 times we have used reconciliation, and of that 22 times, 18 have had instructions to change, alter, or amend tax laws, change, alter, or amend programs such as Medicare, entitlement programs. We have done that. It has become an integral part of the Budget Act of the United States. Without that, you could take the Budget Act and say it is for naught. It would accomplish nothing.

It would be an exercise in debating and then later on we would have as much time as we wanted on every bill. There would be filibusters on every bill and, as contemplated by the Framers, we would get no budget activity in the United States.

Reconciliation includes minimum debate. Without minimum debate, nothing will be done of a budgetary nature for the United States. The Senator understands that. That is why he offers